



Mississippi

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES
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News

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DMR Urges Boaters to Look Out for Migrating Manatee

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) urges boaters to use caution when navigating through our shallow coastal waters, as at least one endangered West Indian manatee is currently migrating through our area. The last sighting of the manatee was near the west side of the Gulfport Harbor. This manatee appears to be heading west, so please take extra precautions if you are traveling in that direction.

Although manatees are often thought of as occurring only in Florida, they are often spotted in shallow coastal waters from as far west as Texas and as far north as South Carolina. In Mississippi, over the past several years manatee sightings have become more common.

Manatees are large, slow-moving, gentle aquatic mammals that spend most of their time eating, resting and swimming. Manatees are herbivorous, eating only aquatic vegetation, and are capable of consuming up to 15 percent of their body weight each day.

Because these aquatic mammals are air-breathers, they must come up to the surface to breath. Manatees can stay submerged for up to 20 minutes when they are inactive, but on average, they come to the surface every three to five minutes to breathe. When resting, manatees often float just below the surface of the water or on the bottom.

Because manatees are considered endangered, boaters must take precautions not to cause harm to them. Boaters cause most of the injuries to manatees when the props from their boats slash the bodies of these hard-to-see aquatic mammals.

There are many things boaters can do to help protect manatees. Here are a few:

- Wear polarized sunglasses so you can see through the water. A swirl and a dark spot in the water could indicate that a manatee is swimming ahead;
- Travel in the deeper channels to minimize your chances of encountering a manatee;
- If you see a manatee, stay at least 50 feet away and motor at a no-wake speed;
- DO NOT FEED A MANATEE. Feeding a manatee only encourages it to stay in an area where there is not enough food to support it;
- Please report all Mississippi manatee sightings to jen.buchanan@dmr.state.ms.us. Please note the location of the sighting and the length and the condition of the animal whenever possible. Also when you can safely take a picture of the manatee, please try to take a picture of its head and body and any scars that are obvious; and
- Manatees in distress should be reported to the Marine Patrol at (228) 523-4134 or the Marine Mammal Stranding Network at 1-888-707-3657 immediately.

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The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the State by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the DMR online at www.dmr.state.ms.us.

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